

Frank Solomon #19  
December 5, 1984

Q: Rev. Solomon, when did you first join the Army?

A: I joined the Army on July 7th, 1941, as a draftee.

Q: Where had you been living when you were drafted?

A: Cleveland, Ohio, on the west side.

Q: Where did you take your basic training?

A: Fort Belvoir, Virginia, the Corps of Engineers.

Q: About when did you finish your basic training?

A: On October 5th we were completely finished with basic and at that time we boarded a train heading for unknown places... troop train that was. It took us 7 days to get across the country, I believe it was. We left on the 5th of October and landed in San Francisco after going across the Country, on October 12th. And from the point we got on the *St. Mihiel*, a troop ship, and headed for places unknown. We found out about 5 days later that we were headed for Hawaii at Schofield Barracks.

Q: Were you shipped as a unit or did you go over as replacements?

A: No, we were shipped as a unit.

Q: And what unit was that?

A: The 34th Engineers. At that time we were called the Hawaiian Department Engineers. It was a basic engineering operation and we moved into the upper post at Schofield Barracks where we had to finish the barracks that we moved into in order to really enjoy the barracks to their fullest capacity.

Q: What was your regular duty as a member of the 34th Engineers?

A: At the time that I was there, I was the First Cook... at the time of Pearl. You might wonder why I ever got in the kitchen being an engineer, but I'm an Austro-Hungarian by birth and I've been cooking since I was a young chap. And I said, no, I'd never get into the GI kitchen, but I knew I could do better at that particular point in time than the cooks that were in my basic training outfit. I know I could have done better with my eyes closed. So I volunteered for the kitchen because I loved it and I still do here at almost age 67. It's a hobby of mine and I love to do it.

Q: What rank were you by the time December rolled around?

A: Just a private. We had only been there about 5 weeks or so...5 or 6 weeks, and I was still a Pvt. 1st Class. Didn't have the same ranks or ratings in those days as they have today.

Q: What did you do the night before the attack, Dec. 6th?

A: I was on duty in the kitchen at that time and our shifts were from 12 noon to 12 noon. And I was preparing things for the following day... for Dec. 7th.

Q: Remember what food you were making?

A: No, I don't remember at this point in time what it was.

Q: Do you remember what you were doing on the morning of Dec. 7th before the attack?

A: Yes, I was...before the attack we had a lot of rumble out there and we heard a lot of planes and a lot of noises. We didn't know what they were. It was a pay day weekend so we thought in our minds, we said, "Gee, they're just a bunch of drunken 'fly boys' from Wheeler Field." We saw planes and we were throwing stones at the planes. The planes were flying above us maybe hundred, two hundred feet. They weren't camouflaged. We didn't know what camouflage was in those days. We also didn't know what the "rising star" was...uh, the "rising sun" rather was in those days, and we just thought they were the "fly boys" from Wheeler Field which was next door. Of course, when the Japanese came over Kolekole Pass and were flying over Schofield Barracks, they had complete freedom. There was no opposition whatsoever of any kind. We didn't have guns. We didn't have ammunition. We wouldn't have known what to do with them if we had them.

Q: Did you see the planes come through Kolekole?

A: Saw them come some from that area. We saw a lot of planes fly. We didn't actually see them come over Kolekole. We saw them come down from the northern range of mountains and we just had a feeling that they were coming over Kolekole because we weren't concerned about anything. But there were just a lot of planes flying with a lot of freedom to buzz our buildings and our barracks, and so forth.

Q: Were they strafing your area?

A: Not at that particular point. We heard the noise at Wheeler, and we heard the noise from Pearl, and Hickam. But they weren't strafing our buildings at that particular point; not until a few minutes later after they.... I would estimate that 5 to 10 minutes they had complete freedom of the air. We were waving at them and they were waving back at us, and we could see them up there... the Japanese pilots. It was just a matter of a few minutes later that they started dropping bombs. They tried to

bomb a million gallon water tank and they missed that. Oh they were only maybe 20 or 30 feet above it... maybe 40 feet. They missed that and then after a few more minutes they started strafing the buildings or the barracks where we lived.

Q: Did they make any hits on the buildings?

A: With strafing they did; with bombs in that area, no.

Q: Did you see any men hit at that time? (tape slips) Were there any men on the ground?

A: Yes, there were three of them in my particular area.

Q: So at that point what did you do?

A: We all ran for cover in the building. See at that particular point in time we had a chow line outside the door where the men were coming in for eggs, however they wanted them cooked. Everything was cooked to order. We were in the headquarters company and we had a good kitchen and everything was cooked to order as they came through for breakfast. We were cooking them pancakes and eggs to order, and so they were in the "chow line" coming in the door at that particular moment.

Q: Were the buildings that you took shelter in concrete or wooden?

A: No, they were wooden... typical wooden barracks.

Q: And how long did you stay in the building?

A: Probably 10 to 15 minutes.

Q: What made you leave?

A: Just the fact that there wasn't any more action out there. It was just quiet.

Q: What did you do at that point?

A: Went back to... well everybody went to talk...a lot of talking about what was going on. We were just talking to each other and we asked the guys... the troops to come in and get their breakfast if they wanted to eat that particular morning.

Q: And what did they do, did they come in ?

A: Oh yes, they did... they did.

Q: Imagine there was a lot of excited conversation there.

A: I don't think the boys ate too much that particular morning, there was so much excitement there.

Q: After breakfast what happened then? Did any of the officers come to take charge of things?

A: Yes, there was a lot of confusion, and they said everybody is going to have to come down and get ammunition, or get assigned ammunition and assigned weapons. And being the 1st Cook, I was assigned a 45(c) caliber pistol that I carried on my hip for over a year.

Q: Did they keep you at Schofield at that point or did they send you to another place (tape slips).

A: No, I was kept at Schofield. I had received an injury from a concussion; at that point I was thrown up against a building where we were watching the planes when they tried to hit that million gallon water tank...water storage tank and my back was hurt and I was taken to the hospital 2 or 3 days later just for a look, some x-rays, some short wave diathermy(?) and for some other analysis to find out if there was anything wrong with my back. And I spent a little more than a year after that at Schofield right in my same Company area... a year and about 3 months before I came back to the states on a cadre. My back did start to give me a lot of problems and we found out later that it was a split disk; that it was caused by the concussion. But it took a long time to be able to find that particular thing with the method that they used in those days. Today you could put it under x-ray or some other fine things and find it immediately, but mine, it was just a herniated disk and it pushed my nerves out.

Q: Was it hurting you on the 7th, later on that day?

A: Just a little sore. Just sore...nothing dramatic like more than a year and a half later.

Q: What did you do that afternoon?

A: We pulled duty, was off at noon, and we went and got assigned our weapons. We took the rest of the afternoon off but there was a lot of confusion as to what to do and who was really in command at that particular point in time.

Q: Sounds like they weren't really too quick about giving out assignments.

A: Yes, we were a relatively new outfit and see we were Headquarters Company. We were generally in our own particular area. The other companies of the battalion were immediately moved out to the various places throughout the Island. But as a Headquarters Company we stayed right there at Schofield to administer to the needs of the battalion.

Q: Did you have guard duty that night?

A: No, I didn't have guard duty. I just had to be ready and available to serve more in my capacity than my one day on and one day off, noon to noon work and noon to noon off. I just had to be ready every day at that particular point in time.

Q: Did the attack result in any kind of changes (tape slips)?

A: Yes, we did because we fed a lot of civilians too in the next few days after that, that they brought on base to work with our engineers, for our bull dozers and our heavy equipment operators.

Q: About how many of these civilians did (tape slips)

A: I think we had somewhere around a hundred and then within a months time we inherited (for lack of a better word... inherited) a group of men called the "Varsity Victory Volunteers" the "VVV". These were all Japanese boys who were students at the University of Hawaii, who were assigned to our 34th engineering group. And they were in the next company to us and they became engineers. They were all volunteers...fine young Japanese college students who volunteered their services to the Government of the United States, many who eventually left and became the cadre for the 442nd that fought in Italy and elsewhere...a very highly decorated infantry organization.

Q: What was the feeling of the men in your company and the other men in the 34th Engineers about these fellows from the "Varsity Victory Volunteers"? Was there any kind of suspicion of them or hostility?

A: No. For some reason there never was to my recollection any questioning of that particular function that they performed. Everyone seemed to understand these young college boys and were appreciative of them unlike in the United States itself, where we had a specific problem. I think this is probably man's inhumanity to man in the United States, because, on the California coast we had specific problems where people were interred, and on the East coast in the Boston area or New York area they were left free to roam and do whatever they wanted to do.

Q: How long were they with you?

A: They were with my organization until after I left in March, 1943, to come back to come back to the United States on a cadre of my own, getting ready to train troops to go to Europe. On that particular cadre I received my promotion as the mess sergeant for Headquarters Company.

Q: Is there any one particular incident or scene that really stands out vividly in your memory about the Pearl Harbor Attack?

A: Are you referring to at the time of the Attack?

Q: Yes.

A: There is something very vivid in my mind but not as a

physical sight. The sound of those particular airplanes that the Japanese used; the Zero. I can recall just a few years ago in Houston, for one of our National Conventions of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, I think it was called the Southern Confederate Air Force, or something, recreated the Battle of Pearl Harbor. They had the same American and Japanese planes. Not only with me but with the thousands of others who were at this particular showing down in Texas, you could just see swelling of the eyes and the tears, just in a split second that particular sound coming back to all those who were at Pearl, at Schofield, Wheeler Field, Hickam Field and so forth... that particular sound that emanated from those Japanese airplanes, coming back to us many, many years later, and it was just though it had been seconds before. That is something after the War that is very dominant feeling and knowing in my life. I remember those particular sounds and remember the bombing and whenever I hear something that is like that, and incidently with many of the movies that have been produced about Pearl bring back that kind of sound, and it just brings back memories of that particular day. It's really interesting to me to know that you can recollect from your memory that sound on a split second in time.

Q: Thank you very much. I really appreciate you taking the time to come up here.

A: Thank you. I'm glad to have been here.